DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 152 604 SO 010 392

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TITLE Teaching Group Dynamics in an Intensive Small Group Laboratory in a Wilderness Setting.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association (Dallas, Texas, March 31-April 2, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Education; Course Organization; Diaries; Discovery Learning; Educational Environment; Educational Innovation; *Experiential Learning; *Field Experience Programs; Group Behavior; Group Discussion; *Group Dynamics; *Group Experience; Group Relations; Higher Education; *Integrated Activities; Observational Learning; *Outdoor Education; Pass Fail Grading; Personal Adjustment; Personal Growth; Seminars; Small Group Instruction; Student Reaction; Teaching Methods; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a group dynamics course designed to integrate academic and experiential learning. The technique used to accomplish this integration was a two week wilderness experience, followed by a seminar in group dynamics during the normal academic term. Four reasons for the wilderness experience are discussed: (1) shared experience among participants; (2) environmental contrast and the inducement of stress and conflict; (3) exposure of participants to varied research methods; and (4) personal growth through the medium of the group. The wilderness portion of the course created a kind of test tube situation by removing the individual from the normal protections of society and placing him in a small group to negotiate the wilderness. Success of the trip was dependent on each participant's ability to function within the small group. In the academic portion of the course, a systematic exposition of theoretical and practical aspects of group dynamics was covered in a seminar atmosphere. Three areas of concern to the instructors of the course included: the potential for physical and emotional disaster, readjustment to the academic and urban milieu, and the evaluation of participants. The paper includes some quotes from the student logs, a chart of the student activities, and the brief class syllabus. (Author/JK)

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TEACHING GROUP DYNAMICS IN AN INTENSIVE SMALL GROUP LABORATORY IN A WILDERNESS SETTING

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*Presented at the Southwestern Social Science Association Meetings, Dallas, Texas, March 31-April 2, 1977. Not for quotation or reprinting without permission of the authors.

Teaching is a form of communication which has a variety of objectives depending on the nature of what is to be communicated. Two essential objectives that abound in most teaching situations are to convey information so it becomes knowledge, and secondly to apply knowledge to other related domains. In a traditional classroom structure acquisition of knowledge is heavily stressed, whereas application of knowledge is more difficult to accomplish especially in the social and behavioral sciences. Unlike the chemist who can combine elements to form compounds in the lab, the social scientist faces the ethical and practical dilemma of laboratory control of human beings. As undergraduate social science major can be saturated with acquisition of knowledge in the tradition classroom, but what is to become of these insights once they are learned? Because of the size and demand of undergraduate classes it may be possible for students to gain experience in actual research or scientific observation of the social world. Perhaps the following parable can best illustrate this point:

> There is an old parable that has made the rounds about the grasshopper who decided to consult the hoary consultant of the animal kingdom, the owl, about a personal problem. The problem concerned the fact that the grasshopper suffered each winter from severe pains due to the savage temperature. After a number of these painful winters, in which all of the grasshopper's known remedies were of no avail, he presented his case to the venerable and wise owl. The owl, after patiently listing to the grasshopper's misery, so the story goes, perscribed a simple solution. "Simply turn yourself into a cricket and hibernate during the wint[illegible]" The grasshopper

> jumped joyously away, profusely thanking the owl for his wise advice. Later, however, after discovering that this important knowledge could not be transformed into action, the grasshopper returned to the owl and asked him how he could perform this metamorphosis. The owl replied rather curtly, "Look, I gave you the principle. It's up to you to work out the details!"

The moral of this parable points to the integration of knowledge and its utilization. This paper extends this theme by addressing the integration of academic and experiential based learning in the teaching of group dynamics. The purpose of this integration is to achieve the goals of knowledge and its generalization to the domains of research and personal growth.

The techniques used to accomplish integration of academic and experiential based learning were a two week wilderness sojourn in the Adirondack Mountains in New York State followed by a seminar in group dynamics during the normal academic term. The instruction in both phases of this teaching experiment was interdisciplinary in orientation by utilizing instructors from both the Departments of Psychology and Sociology. The students who participated in this course also varied in their background and educational orientation. The rationale behind the use of varied methods, instructors, and participants was to achieve a triangulation of factors in the learning process. This rationale follows the theme expressed by Denzin (1970) in which triangulation of design, data, and investigators in the research process cancel out the weaknesses of any one approach while summing their strengths.

WHY THE WILDERNESS? THE REAZIN FOR FREEZIN

It may have occurred to the reader to ask, "Why is it beneficial to engage the wilderness in the study of group dynamics?... especially in bear country!" Kesselheim (1974) relates that outdoor learning can reduce the ambiguity of outcomes of learning, and thus enable learners to "contract their span of attention." The resultant situation is intense, but reduces the number and complexity of variables the learner has to deal with. The popular "Outward Bound" program subscribes to this philosophy by integrating outdoor living with personal growth. In regards to our group dynamics course, there are four reasons for the use of wilderness experience:

1. Shared experience among participants with seminar integration.
2. Environmental contrast and the inducement of stress and conflict.
3. Experiencing varied research methods.
4. Personal growth through the medium of the group.

The first of these reasons directly relates to the main purpose of this teaching experiment which is to integrate experiential and academic based learning. The wilderness experience in an intensive group structure is intended to create identity, cohesion, and shared experience among participants which later would be used in seminar projects, discussions, and research. In the traditional classroom an instructor can put forth examples or experiences to stress an important point, but there is no assurance that isomorphism has taken place. Shared experience, in contrast, provides a

ready resource for students to relate and share "meaning" with members of the seminar. In essence, a common data bank is created that increases communication efficiency. Since engaging the wilderness incorporates both physical and mental tasks, it can be an excellent resource to demonstrate individual versus group task efficiency and other related areas in group process.

The second reason for the wilderness setting is the contrast in the environments of the urban milieu and that of the wilderness. A great deal of change and stress is incurred by the individual moving from the complexities of modern urban life to that of the wild. A tremendous amount of security resides in the traditional instructional modality on a campus. Every participant has "role expectations" (Shaw and Constanzo, 1970:328) and a behavioral repertoire that are ritualized under the guise of education. Everybody "knows" their place. If an instructor attempts to demonstrate group process by means of gaming, simulation, or laboratory control how realistic and valid will results be? What will be the level of awareness and understanding of the students? Students can enter the classroom with the assumption they can be eventually "saved by the bell." In the perspective of Goffman, (1974:122) humanity becomes a "big con."

In an intensive wilderness setting, however, structure can be changed, roles become ambiguous, stress and anxiety come about more spontaneously, new normative systems need to be established, and time can now be measured in events (ie. eating, climbing, thinking) rather than in minutes on a classroom clock.

In short, the previously established normative system becomes dysfunctional, and group maintenance becomes problematic. A realistic and natural setting for the study of group process, formation, and task efficiency occurs.

Demonstration of research methods is a third reason justifying the wilderness experience. In the wilderness setting the predominant research methods is participant observation and can be systematically accomplished by the upkeep of a daily log. These logs can subsequently serve as a means to integrate experience into the classroom. In addition to this valuable exercise, the wild can also serve as an independent variable from which pre and post observations can be taken. The sole benefit of this research design would not be to obtain a significant difference, but rather to serve as a resource for participants to assess change on personal and group levels due to an intensive treatment. It can serve as an empirical attempt to measure social reality in which the students were involved in.

Last, but certainly not any less a reason for the wilderness experience, is the participants ability to assess personal growth through the medium of the group. Many undergraduate students have not had the opportunity to live in an intensive setting with contemporaries of both sexes. The wilderness experience provides the opportunity of communal living with instant feedback about personal hygiene, orientation, attitude, culinary skills, and motivation. The experience also provides the opportunity to improve personal skills in the physical and social realm.

With the stress induced by the wilderness environment new roles and expectations must be formulated by the group. This situation begets anxiety because of the uncertainty of status and role and enhances the possibility of conformity within the group (Asche, 1951). If a group member does not conform and is labeled as a deviant, a tremendous amount of conflict can ensue which in turn provides participants with gut-level feedback on the presentation of self. The potential for awareness of self and change of behavioral repertoire are greatly facilitated.

In summary these four reasons are believed of sufficient import to justify a wilderness trip. Taken in the above context the wilderness experience serves to integrate actual group process into the academic study of groups and their dynamics.

SCENARIO: WE WENT TO THE WOODS

Spawning an idea for a course and then delivering associated concepts into reality is problematical. In regards to the group dynamics course under consideration execution of the course took fourteen weeks, while planning and designing the course extended over a fourteen month period. In the planning phase several crucial issues had to be resolved such as funding, site selection, liability in the event of injury, transportation, equipment, food planning, selection of students, activities on the wilderness portion, and lesson planning for the seminar. Since this was an innovative course (at least for Mount Union College) organizational mechanisms were not in place to aid

instructors in planning. The result of the planning phase was an enjoyable, but often chaotic experience.

In the execution phase of the course the wilderness field experience consisted of a variety of activities (see attachment 1). Backpacking and camping occupied more time than any other single activity. To insure small group dynamics the twenty-four participants were partialed into two groups which performed the same basic activities but at different times. Each group was comprised of ten students and two facilitators. Groups were constructed to maximize heterogeneity on a variety of characteristics. Each group was required to cover a certain distance in a given number of days. Making s selected point in a given amount of time required effort for all, although the amount of strain varied from individual to individual. For a few, it involved pushing themselves nearly to their physical and emotional limits. Problems occurred regarding pace. Resentment arose between fastest and slowest members of the group and both roles were in conflict with the other. Early in the course grumblings were confined to smaller subgroups and increased in intensity until the dam broke. Gut level communication ensued and groups spent much of their time on group maintenance rather than task performance. Nightly campfires, which in one group were termed "chit-chats," evolved as a mechanism to reduce anxiety, stress, and fear. At first campfires centered around jokes which contained limited social redeeming value, and then progressed to discussions of group maintenance and personal growth.

Throughout the course, the instructors attempted not to dominate the situation. They gave instruction to vital areas, but attempted, insofar as possible, to let solutions be a product of individual discovery and group interaction. This was not a course in wilderness survival. It did not teach the "proper" way of doing something, but rather participants were required to be innovative themselves and become aware of group dynamics. For example, the best way to create a shelter or cook was not taught. This was left up to the groups with what resources they had. If they decided on a technique that would result in members being cold, wet, and hungry it was acceptable and considered a learning experience. Thus, the meaning of the experience extended beyond the learning of specific skills--the individual's and group's confidence in their ability to solve problems was increased.

Part of the stress from the experience derived from the fact that both students and faculty members were removed from the comfortable patterns of "dealing with people" and the normal interaction ritual. Essentially, a resocialization process was initiated which included (1) the deliberate redefinition of social roles and norms, (2) a new structure which emphasized the "group" as learning resource base, (3) identification of the individuals capable of being creative, cooperative, and possessing leadership qualities, all of which may have only been dimly perceived before.

The most individual and personal event of the course was the solo. The participant could fast, forage, or subsist on a

very tiny "solo pack" (ie. packet of raisins and peanuts, water, and one beefstick). The equipment that was permissible to have was a poncho, sleeping bag, water bottle, matches, fishing line, and one candle. The participant tended to think a lot during the solo about themselves and group process, since it came towards the end of the two week experience. Each individual was encouraged to keep a log to record their thoughts throughout the entire trip and especially the solo experience.

As was mentioned earlier, two groups were constructed for the wilderness portion of the course. The groups came together as one only briefly during the two week trip. Conflict between the two groups came about early in the trip due to competition (ie. who climbed the mountain best, who had the worst circumstance). This conflict was reduced by intergroup communication, but still remained a reality through a portion of the seminar which followed. A task during the seminar was given to the entire group and served to minimize this conflict to a normal level.

In sum, the wilderness portion of the course created a kind of test-tube situation by removing the individual from the normal protections of society and placing the individual in a small group to negotiate the wilderness. Success of the trip was dependent on participant's ability to function efficiently within the framework of the small group. This experience was not fundamentally different from other human situations, but the essential factors which comprised the experience were made more intense and visible.

In the academic portion of the course a systematic exposition of theoretical and practical aspects of group dynamics were covered in a seminar atmosphere (see attachment 2 for syllabus). In a real sense it was a continuation of the wilderness experience but with a new task. The seminar members were given a great deal of autonomy in presenting the planned topics for each session. Instructors played a resource role and acted more as facilitators than academicians.

Academically, students came to understand important factors concerning the individual and group dynamics in a way that reading and classroom lecture could not provide. The wilderness portion of the course provided real data on the assessment of various hypotheses. In addition to the wilderness experience being used as data, pre and post test instruments provided the group with empirical referent to evaluate change and outcome of group process. These instruments centered around self esteem, group affiliation, and life attitudes. The combination of experience and academic learning synthesized a superior form of knowledge about the dynamics of groups than a course failing to utilize these instructional modalities.

SENSITIVE AREAS IN THE COURSE: HOW TO GIVE A GRADE

Like other courses the group dynamics course has areas in which the instructors should be sensitive to and anticipate before they happen. In specific three areas need clarification to aid others interested in using academic and experiential-based learning in intensive small groups. First, an intense

experience in group dynamics whether in the lab or in a wilderness setting can incur casualities both physically and emotionally. Fortunately for our particular course, shinsplints was the worst physical ailment that occurred. The potential for physical and emotional disaster was ever present. The authors would not suggest this modality of teaching for those instructors that are not experienced with small groups or do not possess training in first-aid, survival, and woodsmanship. Much of the wilderness portion of our course was patterned after the "Outward Bound" program, and we would suggest this course highly for those interested in designing their own course.

A second area of concern in teaching a course of this nature is that of "reintegration." After intense experience within groups it may be difficult for both instructors and students to readjust to the academic and urban milieu. As one student related:

> "I was very sad to be going back to civilization that day. It was a severe emotional letdown to me to have to face the world again after having been through such a wonderful experience with such wonderful people. After having been so anxious to leave the woods just one day before, I now wanted to return with all my heart. I must have gained something very special and valuable out there." DAVE SILK - SENIOR

The academic portion of the course will aid in the reintegration of society as will other activities if planned.

A third area of concern to the instructors of a course of this nature is evaluation of participants. Experiences are hard to grade "A to F," and the attached seminar may be problematical as well. It is suggested therefore that a pass-fail system be

utilized when possible.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the group dynamics course was a tremendous success from the vantage point of participants, faculty, and student body. The integration of the experiential and academic based learning modalities provides an excellent alternative to the traditional classroom structure. It in part alleviates the dilemma of providing information in the classroom without transforming into knowledge. In closing, the following quote from a student can best describe what the experience meant to all and the realization of group process it involved.

> "I was prepared to be disappointed with the solo. I was at a point where I wanted to be challenged--I wanted to prove myself. This was just going to be a vacation to catch up on my sleep and get a tan. Big deal. After I was dropped off, and set up my site, I wrote in my journal: "It's getting cold and uncomfortable; but I've become a fanatic about putting myself to the test, and I don't want to have it too easy." I began to miss people immediately, but just on the level of needing their support and protection. I wrote for a long time, filling many pages in my journal, thinking back on the transitions that had come about between group members on the trip. As it grew dark, and extremely cold, I began writing a silly poem that got more serious as I wrote. As I wrote about each group member, I missed them, and found myself worrying and wondering how they were doing. My journal reads, "I worry about Gloria. She was only wearing a windbreaker. It's funny how protective the group has gotten. I get pissed at having to wait for Gloria; but we all take really good care of her and feel sorry for her." My writings, like my poem, got more and more serious and committal to the other group members as the day turned to night--just as my overall transition on the trip. I loved these people that were cold strangers to me such a short while ago. Here I was, a totally self-centered individual, forgetting about my own cold body to worry about the others. This wasn't like me at all. I was involved. I was concerned. And I was dying to see them all again." ANN BUSSER (SENIOR)

REFERENCE

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Note: Student quotes are from seminar papers by students during Fall Term 1976. The authors extend their thanks to Dave Silk and Ann Busser.

Syllabus

Group Dynamics
Psychology/Sociology 425

Fall, 1976
Instructors:
Bob Baird
Steve Kramer
Gene Petrus

Purpose of the Course: The main purpose of this course is to arrive at an understanding of small groups and their dynamics. We will explore and study individuals interacting in small groups. The initial two week wilderness experience will serve to sensitize the participants to themselves, the complexities of social interactions and the dynamics of groups. With this common experience as a basis for discussion, we will then look more closely at various topics, principles, and theories concerning group dynamics.

Process: Students are expected to share in the teaching and learning process. 1) In the first class, you will divide up into subgroups of from three to five persons each. These subgroups will be responsible for three thirty-minute presentations during the term. The topics for the presentations will be auctioned off at the first class. Each team will have 500 points to use for bidding on the topics. These topics, usually two presented each week, will be the core around which each week's class will evolve. Everyone will be expected to read ahead of time the topic's coverage in the text. Presenters will be expected to go beyond the text's coverage in their presentation. The presentations can take whatever form the subgroup chooses (i.e. demonstrations, experiments, role-playing, use of examples from the wilderness experience, lectures, etc.) as long as the material is well covered. Originality is highly encouraged. The rest of each class will be spent in various ways -- some lectures, perhaps, but primarily we'll be attempting to relate the topics to the wilderness experience and you are encouraged to do so in your reading and discussion. Topics for each week are listed on the last page of this syllabus. 2) Attendance: Because of the nature of the course, attendence is expected at all classes. 3) Evaluation.

60% A) Group presentations. Each presentation will be worth 20% of your final grade. The rest of the class will decide 10% of each grade and the three faculty members will decide the other 10%.

25% B) Individual paper or project. This will be an extensive paper or project that ties together the wilderness experience and the theory we'll be covering in class. Your journals should serve as excellent resources for this project.

15% C) Classroom participation. a) Contributions to the week's discussion that demonstrates understanding of the material. b) Convocation presentation -- we will be working together to make a presentation for convocation Nov. 3rd.

Learning Resources

Required Texts

Shaw	Group Dynamics
Read	Alive

Books Available From Instructors and Library

Luft	Group Processes of Human Interaction
Shepherd	Small Groups
Davis	Group Performance
McFeat	Small Group Cultures
Crosbie	Interaction in Small Groups
Rapoport	N-Person Game Theory
Singleton	Games and Programs
Ofshe	Interpersonal Behavior in Small Groups
Wrightsman	Cooperation and Competition: Readings in Mixed Motive Games
Caplow	Two Against One
Bartos	Simple Models of Group Behavior
Calhoun	Persons-In-Groups
*Cartwright and Zander	Group Dynamics
Blau	Exchange and Power
Homans	The Human Group
Scheflen	Human Territories
Homans	Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms

Date	Topic	Group
Sept. 27	Approaches to the Study of Groups Relationships of Individuals and Groups	
Oct. 4	Group Formation and Development The Physical Environment of Groups	
Oct. 11	The Personal Environment of Groups The Social Environment of Groups	
Oct. 18	Outward Bound: Philosophy and Effectiveness	
Oct. 25	Structure of Groups Power in Groups	
Nov. 1	Leadership Task Specification Accomplishment	
Nov. 8	Experiential Group Process	
Nov. 15	Effective Communication/Participation in Groups Conflict and Conflict Resolution Intervention Tactics: The Consulting Process	

ATTACHMENT 1: SOJOURN INTO THE WILDERNESS!!! A REAL TRIP

Sun. Aug. 22	Mon. Aug. 23	Tues. Aug. 24	Wed. Aug. 25	Thur. Aug. 26	Fri. Aug. 27	Sat. Aug. 28
Students Arrive Mount Union 12-1 p.m. 1. 2-5 p.m.; camping, simulation 2. m. run + ex.	Orientation: 1. First Aid 2. Equipment 3. Navigation 4. Packing 5. Repelling and Climbing	Travel Arrive N. Y. 6 p.m.	Group A Canoeing Group B Climb West Mountain	Group A Canoeing Group B Climb West Mountain Group A + B Together on "Big Island"	Group A Climb West Mountain Group B Canoeing	
Sun. Aug. 29	**Mon. Aug. 30**	**Tues. Aug. 31**	**Wed. Sept. 1**	**Thur. Sept. 2**	**Fri. Sept. 3**	**Sat. Sept. 4**
Backpack Limekiln Reserve Both groups separate.	Group A Solo Group B Bushwack and Traverse	Group A Solo Group B Solo	Group A Bushwack and Traverse Group B Solo	Groups A + B backpack separately through West Canada Lakes Region		
Sun. Sept. 5	**Mon. Sept. 6**	**Tues. Sept. 7**	**Wed. Sept. 8**	**Thurs. Sept. 9**	**Fri. Sept. 10**	**Sat. Sept. 11**
Travel Arrive Mount Union College 7 p.m.	Clean Up and Equipment Check		ORIENTATION WEEK Collapse and Ketchup			Classes and Seminar Begin Sept. 13, 1976